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Johnson Touches All Bases, Then Acts

By ROBERT HALL McNEIL
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 3—Hour after hour President Lyndon Johnson calls on the brains of government—on individuals and groups with relevant knowledge of and authority in such matters—to inform himself as crises mushroom over the globe.

He calls on outsiders, too, among them men who have been in government. He calls on members of Congress who have made careers of learning about operations and problems of specific departments; on old friends and new whose horse sense he

trusts; and on newspapermen. He consults with our allies.

It is the pattern he used so intensively when he was Senate majority leader. His practice then, as now, was to "touch all the bases."

Not An Automatic Process

Out of this effort to inform himself and expose himself to a wide spectrum of views, Johnson tries to equip himself with the materials out of which he must fashion—with the help of his intuition—the new and troublesome decisions only the President can make.

This is not always such a

tidy process as some historians would make it appear. It is never like feeding material into a computer, punching a button and getting an answer. Because, for one thing, there are imponderables which in a special way must crowd in on a man when he realizes that he is the President of all these United States. And even in a man so confident and sometimes impetuous as Johnson, there must be a feeling it is but human to err. Err he will sometimes, if he has not already done so.

Whom does the President see to help him guide the na-

tion in the tricky seas of foreign relations?

SECRETARY OF STATE Dean Rusk. His conferences with the man President Kennedy selected as the No. 1 assistant in his administration can be numbered by the score since Johnson took office Nov. 22.

THE NATIONAL Security Council, created by law to advise with the President in the related fields of defense and foreign affairs.

THE JOINT Chiefs of Staff with their own sources of information.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE Robert McNamara,

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whose acute mind has made a deep impression on the President.

JOHN McCONE, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, whom he has met dozens of times over the last 70 days.

SUCH CONGRESSIONAL experts as Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D., Ark.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Sen. Richard Russell (D., Ga.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Old pals of Senate days, to be sure, but knowledgeable. Some insiders say Russell has had as much as anyone to do with "running" the Defense Department and the CIA.

SUCH OUTSIDERS as former Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

EX-PRESIDENTS Eisenhower, Truman and Hoover.

There are others, as well, who either have been called into the White House or consulted over Johnson's favorite device, the telephone.

Has Held 175 Conferences

Appointment books probably won't show them all, but the President has had about 175 conferences, of one sort or another, on foreign affairs.

This is one reason his days often stretch from 6:30 a.m. to 1 a.m.

Johnson dealt in part with his own Johnsonian decision-making processes in his weekend press conference.

He said "we have been consulting with all parties" concerned in the Indonesian-Malaysian dispute and had sent Att. Gen. Robert Kennedy there to give both parties the word.

Calm and Earnest

We have been in constant consultations with our allies regarding the troubled course of independence in several East African states," he said. He has been "discussing with the free nations of Asia" the problems raised there by the French recognition of Red China.

Frenetic as Johnson sometimes was in his Senate days, it was a calm and earnest man—just 10 weeks in the world's biggest job—who started his first formal televised press conference last weekend by saying:

"It is not our desire or in our interest to create an air for emergency about these (foreign problems) or other events.

"Our work proceeds both day and night, quietly, steadily, I believe confidently and I think the American people have every reason to share in that confidence."

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